Directive on research at ETH Zurich in emergency mode

The Vice President for Research (VPR), pursuant to article 10 paragraph 4 of the ETH Zürich Organisational Ordinance (RSETHZ 201.021), issues the following directive:

19 March 2020

Preamble

Based on the current spread of the coronavirus and the reinforced measures passed by the Swiss Federal Council, ETH's Executive Board decided on 16 March 2020 to only permit the physical presence of ETH members where it is absolutely indispensable. All other employees must work from home starting immediately.

This also means that all experimental research will have to be shut down with immediate effect. Practical research in laboratories is basically no longer permitted, independently of whether social distancing can be ensured or not. Exceptions to this rule are explained below and concern in particular the operation and maintenance of critical infrastructures, the protection of laboratory animals, research on COVID-19, and the prompt transition from regular operations to emergency mode.

It goes without saying that any research that does not involve experiments as well as all activities that can be performed electronically (e.g. theoretical work, data analysis, manuscript writing) are to be continued after their relocation to home offices.

The Executive Board asks all members of ETH Zurich to back their decisions. The board will discuss in due time which pragmatic solutions ETH can offer to mitigate delays of projects and careers. The board also asks for your patience until this and other questions (e.g. concerning financial support) can be addressed.

The following regulations apply to research in emergency mode:

Scope with regard to property and personnel: The regulations described below apply to the complete research infrastructure of ETH Zurich and to all members of ETH Zurich who pursue experimental research, no matter if they conduct it at the departments, in extradepartmental units, or using technology platforms.

Moreover, the regulations apply to spin-off companies of ETH Zurich which are renting ETH rooms or whose employees use ETH laboratory infrastructure or draw benefits from technology platforms, as well as more generally to all employees of partner institutions in the case of shared institutes and units.

1. Experimental research at ETH Zurich is to be shut down in an orderly manner. All work in laboratories that is not classified as a critical service may only be conducted if it serves to bring an experiment to a halt as swiftly as possible.

2. Indispensable, critical infrastructures will continue to be in service and maintained. This includes all measures that are strictly necessary for ensuring their operations and that cannot be postponed. In particular, ETH's central IT infrastructure and the scientific computing infrastructure (CSCS, Scientific Compute Clusters) are guaranteed to be able to continue their operations.
3. Units responsible for tasks of national importance will continue carrying out their tasks within the scope of their federal duties (e.g. SED’s earthquake monitoring services).

4. Work with laboratory animals is restricted to their husbandry and protection.

5. An emergency plan for maintaining laboratory infrastructure must be submitted and approved separately by each research group. The professors submit these plans to the Heads of their Department, who make a preselection that they pass on to the VPR (research@sl.ethz.ch, subject line “Labore im Notbetrieb”). Forms for the contingency plans are included as Appendix A.

Exceptions concerning experimental research and spin-offs:

- Requests for exceptions concerning experimental research are to be submitted to the responsible Head of Department. The departments will be responsible for the preselection. Requests that are supported by the department can be submitted immediately but at the latest by 23 March 2020 to the Vice President of Research at research@sl.ethz.ch. The subject line should be “Forschung Notbetrieb”. All requests will be examined and approved by a special committee called “Forschung Notbetrieb” that has been appointed by the VPR. Forms for the submission are attached as Appendix B. Since exemptions will be only be granted in exceptional cases and after careful examination, immediate arrangements must be made to reduce all experimental research to the absolute minimum.

- Research on Covid-19 is highly welcome. However, it must be demonstrated that it can be directly applied and implemented in the near future. It also must be approved by the new special committee called “COVID-19-Forschung”. Proposals may be submitted at any time to the Vice President of Research at research@sl.ethz.ch and must contain information on the researchers involved and required infrastructure as well as a brief description of the research plan and the expected outcomes (max. 3 pages). The subject line should be “Covid-19-Forschung”. The submission is attached as Appendix C.

- Technology platforms that are directly subordinate to the Vice President of Research as well as units that do not belong to a department should submit their proposals directly to research@sl.ethz.ch.

- Departmental platforms should submit to their department. The proposals must include the type of work performed and a justification, as well as the planning of the employees and their presence times (max. 2 pages).

- We are in the process of clarifying legal requirements with regard to contractually accorded services (including research projects) to third parties in the case of acts of nature. Corresponding regulations will be communicated shortly.

- The regulations described above also apply to spin-offs that work on the premises of ETH Zurich (incl. Technopark Einsteintrakt). Accordingly, minimal operations and experiments can only be permitted in exceptional cases. Requests with the subject line “Spin-off im Notbetrieb” are to be submitted to research@sl.ethz.ch, cc’ing Dr Marjan Kraak (marjan.kraak@sl.ethz.ch). The necessary form is Appendix D.

The Heads of Department and the directors of any involved technology platforms will be informed by the Vice President of Research about approvals for exemption requests.

The regulations above apply both to ETH Zurich’s departments and to its technology platforms. All ETH members as well as persons affiliated with other institutions who work on the premises of ETH Zurich are subject to these regulations. Each unit is responsible for the implementation of these measures.

Regulations for units that are operated in collaboration with other institutions will be communicated soon. The same applies to field experiments and measurement infrastructures outside the premises of ETH Zurich.

For the Singapore-ETH Centre, the local regulations in Singapore apply. Doctoral students who are currently still in Switzerland but are employed at SEC have to observe the restrictions on departure and entry between Switzerland and Singapore.
Additional general notes:

- All employees should shut down any client computers that they leave at ETH (energy consumption, fire hazard, cyber criminality).
- The same applies to device controllers, i.e. computers that control scientific devices such as microscopes, centrifuges etc.
- The ID Service Desk will continue to be at the disposal of all employees and students via tickets, email or telephone (https://ethz.ch/services/en/it-services/service-desk.html).

More information, contact points for questions and request forms will be published over the course of the next few days on ETH Zurich’s Covid-19 website.

This directive is in force from 18 March 2020 onwards and will remain so until further notice. It may be abrogated by the VPR.

Integral attachments to this directive:

Appendices A-D